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# Hog Cholera

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Although Eradicated, Still A Threat

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## Hog Cholera: Although Eradicated, Still A Threat

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Hog cholera is an acute, highly contagious, frequently fatal viral disease of swine. The disease, first recognized in the United States in 1833, resulted for many years in annual losses of up to \$50 million. Only swine are naturally susceptible to hog cholera; the disease is not a health hazard to man. Although clinically similar to African swine fever, hog cholera is caused by a distinctly different virus.

### How It Spreads:

The most common method of spread of hog cholera is by direct contact between infected and susceptible swine. Hog cholera also can be spread indirectly when susceptible pigs come in contact with the body secretions from infected pigs; when susceptible animals come in contact with contaminated pens and vehicles; and when flies, birds, other animals, and some parasites mechanically carry the virus from infected to susceptible swine. In rare cases, an infected sow may pass the virus to her unborn babies. Indirect transmission can happen when hogs are fed raw or improperly cooked garbage with pork scraps containing hog cholera virus.

### Signs:

The clinical features of hog cholera vary with the severity of the infection. A highly virulent strain may affect susceptible pigs of all ages, producing high body temperatures and killing over 90 percent of those infected from 5 to 19 days after initial exposure.

Viruses with low virulence produce milder clinical illness with lower body temperatures and lower death losses. Pigs with chronic hog cholera often live to become stunted pigs, or runts. A few cases may occur in which pigs appear normal but carry the virus and can spread it to other susceptible pigs.

Pigs seldom show signs of hog cholera until 4 to 7 days after they become infected. With low virulent or chronic hog cholera, the incubation period can be much longer.

If your pigs show *any* of the following signs, you should suspect hog cholera and call a veterinarian to confirm the diagnosis:

- Body temperature over 104° F (42° C); 102° F (40° C) is normal.
- No interest in food.
- Unusually slow and inactive; lie piled together.
- Gaunt in appearance.
- Sticky eye discharge.
- Constipation at first—later diarrhea and occasionally vomiting.



Pigs tend to huddle together as if cold when infected with hog cholera.



Affected pigs may be weak and wobbly and may sit "dog" fashion.



Affected hog showing rough hair coat and dejected appearance.



- Red areas on skin of ears, abdomen, or legs (most apparent on white hogs).
- Weakness, trembling, inability to stand.
- Weak, abnormal, or dead piglets.
- Unusual illness or high death losses at weaning time or other stress periods.
- Chronically ill animals.

Secondary infection can confuse the clinical picture, so these signs may not always be clear.

## **Post-Mortem Lesions:**

The most common post-mortem findings are hemorrhage in the kidneys, lymph nodes, urinary bladder, skin, larynx, lungs, and large intestines. Pinpoint hemorrhages are common on the kidneys; the spleen develops wedge-shaped infarcts (areas of dead tissue); button ulcers may be found in the intestines; and the lymph nodes and skin may be congested and hemorrhagic.

## **Confusion With Other Diseases:**

Some of the signs of hog cholera may be similar to those of domestic swine diseases such as swine erysipelas, acute salmonellosis, pasteurellosis, and streptococcosis. Because of this, rapid laboratory assistance in diagnosing hog cholera is vital. Hog cholera should be suspected until it is either confirmed or ruled out by identifying another disease as the cause of illness.

## **Prevention:**

If you suspect hog cholera, call your local veterinarian or State or Federal animal health official immediately. A trained veterinarian will be sent to look at your hogs free of charge to determine if hog cholera is the disease problem. Any delay in diagnosing hog cholera could be very costly to the U.S. swine industry.

The reappearance of hog cholera in an area could result from:

- Feeding improperly cooked garbage containing pork scraps from swine infected with hog cholera virus.
- Introducing infected swine, or their products, from other countries.

Outbreaks since 1972 show how quickly hog cholera can spread when the virus is introduced into swine markets. The complex commercial movements of swine and their products in the United States makes prompt diagnosis and eradication of hog cholera vital. Infected animals can “shed” the virus several days before illness is noticed, which points up the need to isolate herds with hog-cholera-suspect pigs until a diagnosis is made.

The United States was declared free of hog cholera in 1978 following a 15-year eradication campaign, but hog cholera exists in many countries with which the United States trades. So animal health officials enforce



strict import regulations to keep hog cholera out of the United States and maintain an extensive national surveillance program to quickly detect introduced outbreaks.

## How You Can Help:

Your interest in reading this brochure is the first step in helping to keep the United States free of hog cholera. The second step is regular observation of your swine for any changes in appearance, appetite, or behavior. In addition, you should:

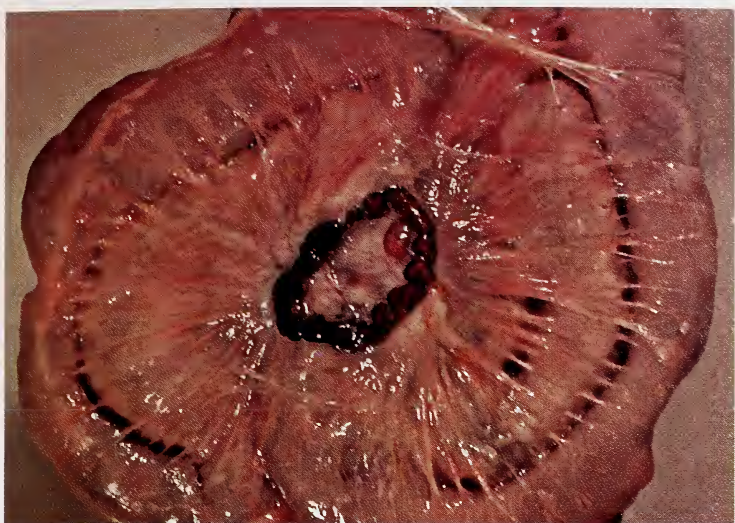
- Cook or treat all garbage fed to swine to destroy any hog cholera virus.
- Make sure your hogs have no contact with hogs you are not sure are healthy.
- Isolate newly purchased pigs for 21 days.
- Practice good sanitation and fly control.
- Avoid visiting other hog farms.
- Make sure vehicles and footwear are disinfected before allowing them on your farm.
- Check all animals daily for signs of illness.
- Isolate sick pigs until the cause of illness is determined.
- Report sick pigs promptly to your veterinarian or to State or Federal animal health officials.

Your best insurance is to “think hog cholera” when confronting a disease in swine involving fever, loss of appetite, loss of coordination, small or abnormal litters, or unusual illness or death loss at weaning.

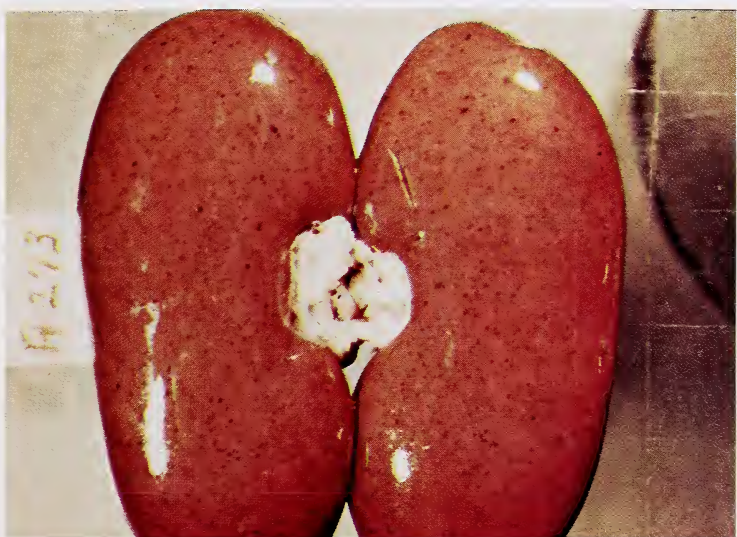


Purplish discoloration of skin and matted eyes are common signs of hog cholera.





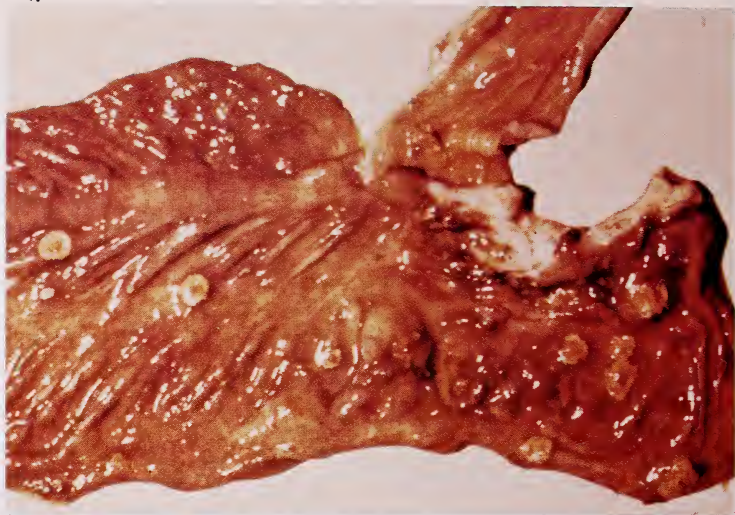
Mesenteric lymph nodes showing dark superficial hemorrhage.



Pinpoint hemorrhages on the kidneys are characteristic.



Raised, darkened areas on the spleen called "infarcts" are common.



**"Button" ulcers on the lining of the intestine.**

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